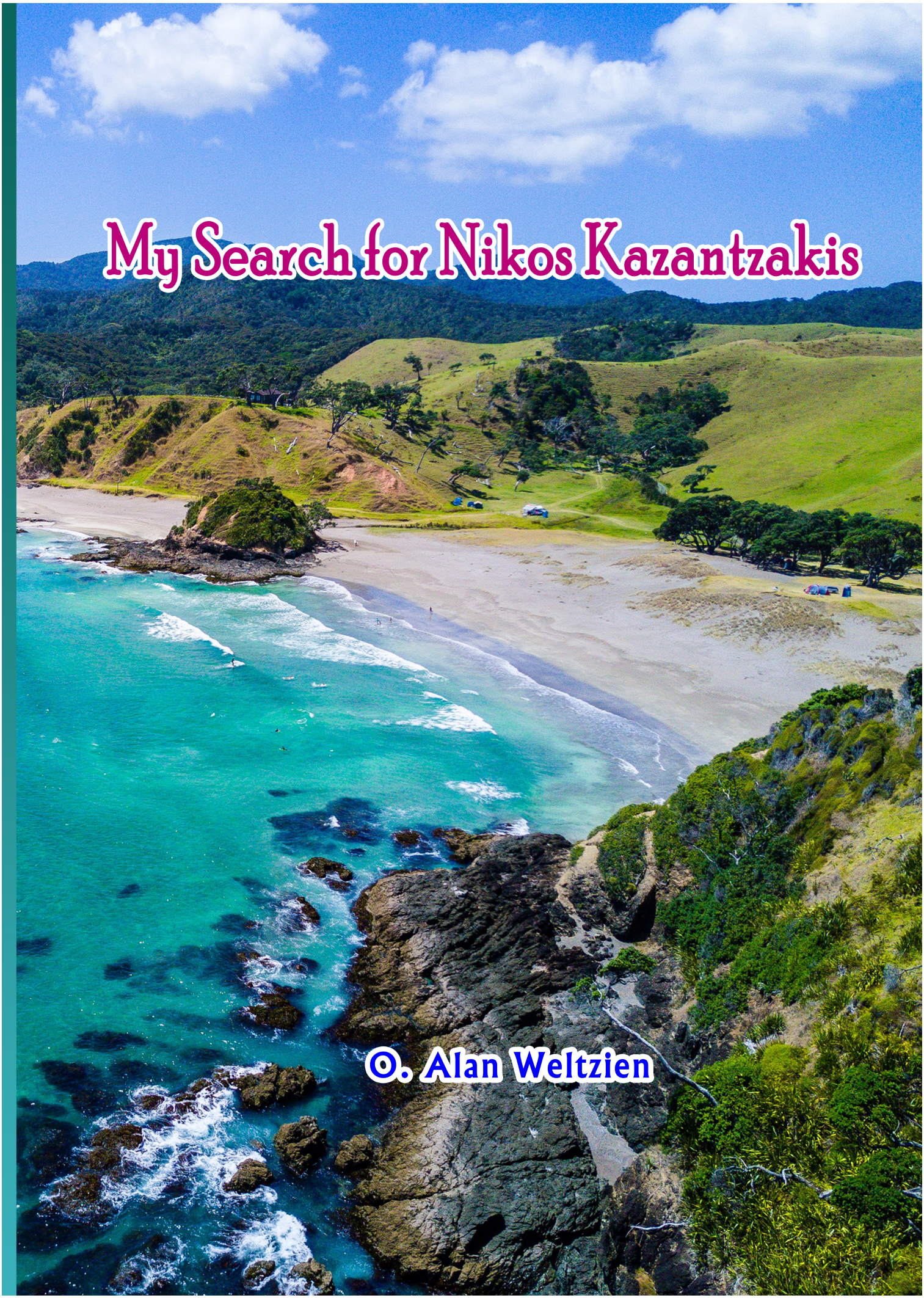
My Search for Nikos Kazantzakis
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Preface

Nikos Kazantzakis died too early. The decade following his death (1957) confirmed anew his international reputation. I would argue he's easily the most famous 20th-century Greek writer, at least from a global perspective. English translations of most of his novels, as well as his massive *The Odyssey: A Modern Sequel*, appeared sequentially for eight years following his death. By the time English readers encountered his memoir or autobiographical novel, *Report to Greco* (trans. 1965)—I've read it described as one or the other—his world audience knew, once again, that this Greek writer, a towering figure, had contributed a large oeuvre to world letters.

Introduction

A half century ago I first read *Zorba The Greek* (*Alexis Zorbas* in Greek). Soon thereafter I first saw Michel Cacoyannis's black-and-white film adaptation (1964), shot on Crete. The novel and film slid in and out of one another in my mind. To say they left a big impression is an understatement. I hear Anthony Quinn's laughter and Mikis Theodorakis's musical score in my head, any time. My infatuation led me to his other fiction and, eventually, to Crete.

I have long been a devotee to literary pilgrimages for a variety of personal reasons. I've tracked writers' homes or workplaces in many USA states and many countries. I had wanted to visit Crete for many, many years, and the Kazantzakis pilgrimage, which unfolded in several locations, only deepened my infatuation with Kazantzakis who models, as well as any writer I know, life as a chronic spiritual and intellectual quest. For this reason if no other, he remains a model of the artist in the 20th century.

I

From our balcony I glimpse parts of the old Venetian harbor and the Cretan Sea beyond. I stand on the fifth floor of Chania's Hotel Kydon, "the Heart City Hotel." Across the street looms the 1913 public market building. Our group of seventeen students and more than a dozen "community members" meet in the lobby at 8:00 p.m. We usually meet around then, and Yorgos Christinis, owner of GreenGreece.com tour company and our tour director, leads us somewhere to a pair of long tables. Yorgos, a middle-aged gay man with black-rimmed glasses, speaks with a honeyed baritone. He sports a careful mustache he claims he grew just for our tour. Everyone loves Yorgos who's witty and sentimental. You know the type, I hope.

By 8:00 p.m. in Greece, the day's heat having fallen, everybody's out and about, *passeggiata*. We stroll down the pedestrian Chalidon past the cathedral and Patriarchi Athinagora Square where kids run around, some kicking a soccer ball, while parents chat in cafes along the fringe. Once we reach the old harbor lined with bars and restaurants and shops, we walk along Akti Tombazi, settle at those tables, await the bread and red wine carafes. It takes the students several evenings to learn to pace themselves through a Greek dinner. Tonight the courses climax with bream served with scalloped potatoes in a seasoned sauce. Greek dinners stretch my stomach. We don't

reach the hotel until after 11:00 p.m. In the cathedral square, more kids than ever. Bedtime works differently here.

Lights shimmer off the curled inner harbor and the Venetian lighthouse (many Cretan cities retain one) pulses with soft light. Visitors and locals throng the harbor and marina but the collective hum enhances rather than subtracts from the painterly night scene. It's plenty warm to stay outside at September's end. I'm as seduced as the students. Our old *Rough Guide* claims Chania (accent on the third syllable) remains, "spiritually, the capital of Crete" and "by far the island's most attractive city." In my subsequent wanderings inside the old town's bastions, I try to lose myself in old alleys with potted plants, stride more than once along the rampart/breakwater to inspect that lighthouse up close.

I'm finally in *Kriti* (accent on the first syllable), Greece's largest, southernmost island, where I've wanted to walk for decades. Lynn and I have travelled in Macedonia, Thessaly, the Peloponnese, and the Ionian islands before, but Crete has pulled me hard because I've been looking for Nikos Kazantzakis, native son and, in my opinion, Greece's most internationally famous writer in the 20th century. Never mind that Giorgios Seferis (1963) and Odysseas Elytis (1979) have won the Nobel Prize Kazantzakis was nominated for years earlier. He should have been Greece's first prize winner. That's another common story where politics trumps literary quality.

II

My story begins my freshman year in college. Nearing the year's end, the English professor, J. Patrick Tyson from Texas, decided he wanted to end on an upbeat note, so we read *Zorba The Greek* (1946; trans. 1952). I've never recovered, particularly after repeatedly watching Michael Cacoyannis's famed black-and-white adaptation (1964), shot in Crete near Chania. I'd never encountered a larger-than-life character like Zorba, who epitomized joie de vivre and whose instinctual life knocked hard against my shyness and introspection covered over with a veneer of gab.

Kazantzakis had written five earlier novels amidst his many plays and worked on his magnum opus, *The Odyssey: A Modern Sequel,* which occupied him thirteen years (1925-38). But *Zorba* remains his first mature novel and most famous work, and I think I know why. Since that first reading I've pondered the novel's central relationship between Basil, the shy writer bound for Crete and a lignite mine (a family interest), and the Dionysiac Zorba, who hurtles into his life and ours, forever stamping them.

From Kazantzakis's biography we know about his long, deep friendship with Yiorgis Zorbas (1867-1941), which began when they met on the Mount Athos peninsula in October 1915. Most importantly, they

lived together while working a lignite mine at Prastova, just down the coast from Kalamata on the Mani peninsula, in southwest Peloponnese. It failed, but that fact in no way lessened the older man's influence on the writer. When Kazantzakis learned of Zorbas's death he immediately began fictionalizing his story—not even changing his surname. That fact underlines Zorbas's role in Kazantzakis's life.

Zorba represents the most dramatic expression, in all the writer's oeuvre, of the notion of *elan vital* or "life force": a theory he ingested from his Paris teacher, philosopher Henri Bergson.

Only in old age, Kazantzakis—dramatist and epic poet—turned hard into fiction, writing at a furious pace a string of novels in roughly a decade. And his fiction remains, at least internationally, his best-known work. According to one source, he'd told his protégé, Pantelis Prevelakis, that novels were a "form of personal recreation."

The more I've read this writer, the more I've realized he represents himself in Basil, the chronicler-narrator, who respects and loves the wild Zorba, who at times wants to become him, but whose introverted nature makes him fall short, mostly. I could relate, particularly once I lifted myself out of my shy fog after college. Zorba shows us how to dance through sorrow, live without inhibitions; how to live by action, not by paralyzing self-consciousness. It's hard to shed inhibitions, whatever their source, that cling like old pants that have shrunk.

That village, beach, small bay, steep rocky hillside in Cacoyannis's *Zorba* appear in my mind's eye as quickly as the faces of

the movie's central quartet: Anthony Quinn, Alan Bates, Irene Papas, and the lesser-known Lila Kedrova. Sometimes I hear Quinn's big, enfolding laughter even before Mikis Theodorakis's famous musical score. Quinn, a giant for two generations or more, played lead roles in a basketful of movies. But no role is more famous than his Zorba: hard to distinguish the novel's Zorba and Quinn's face as he laughs and dances through life. It stamped him.

Like Quinn, Theodorakis, judged by many Greece's most famous composer, has had an enormous career in many genres, but there's no more famous a piece that his "Zorba's Dance." Musicians in every Greek restaurant know and play this first *sirtaki* (dance): along with the theme from *Never on Sunday* (1960), unofficial Greek national anthems in the 20th-century's second half, at least for visitors.

Greek dancer and choreographer Giorgos Provias invented the *sirtaki* for Cacoyannis's film. So it's a recent folk dance in a culture where folk dancing has thrived for millennia. *Sirtaki* comes from the Greek work, *syrtos,* which means to "drag or lead the dance"—that first forward step where you bend knee and body, arms straight out, usually on neighbors' shoulders. This first, most famous *sirtaki* begins with a slow *Hassapiko* sequence and turns into a *Hassaposerviko*, which includes elements of *pidikhtos,* or hopping and leaping.

I could say it's all Greek to me, and likely, you. But this *sirtaki,* we later realize, is easy to learn and execute. Besides, who can resist Anthony Quinn's invitation to Basil once he's loosened his necktie, rolled up his left sleeve, snapped his fingers, and summoned the

dance? It's fresh after the fiasco that signals Basil's last effort to make a go of it with the mine. Instead of the crowd and a feast of roasted goat, mentor and protégé drink, laugh, and dance. Basil's breakthrough—"Teach me to dance, will you?"—climaxes his apprenticeship in life under Zorba, and I've always joined as eagerly as Alan Bates's Basil. Except I've never actually danced the *sirtaki* until Greece, with students.

The timbre of the bouzouki delights me like few other stringed instruments, I don't know entirely why. Not as much twang as a dobro but a similar resonance. When the solo bouzouki begins "Zorba's Dance" (key of G)—grace note C# to D, later B-C, a few 4-5-note fast flurries as the melody drops to G—my body hums. Always.

I like to think Kazantzakis would love the *sirtaki* and even tolerate the screenplay's abridgement of the novel. The novel's final pages (after "I never saw him again") swiftly traverse the remaining twenty-five (or so) years in Zorba's life, up through his death in a village near Skopje, in what we now call Kosovo. Then the narrator rescues him from death.

In one dream Zorba laments to Basil, "'Where can I enter? How can I bring myself to life? . . .if only I could live free, and not have to cling like a drowning man to your warm and living bodies!'" After a later dream about Zorba, Basil is "filled with an irresistible desire to reconstitute the life we had lived together on the coast of Crete, to drive my memory to work and gather together all the sayings, cries, gestures, gears, and dances which Zorba had scattered in my mind—to

save them." Basil, living on the coast of Aegina just as Kazantzakis did during the World War II years, completes the manuscript before receiving word of Zorba's death. Writer and narrator know what we're all charged to know, that "'Love is stronger than death.'"

III

My long search for Kazantzakis takes me on several journeys into his wide oeuvre, but that first journey to *Zorba*, Anthony Quinn, and Theodorakis's *sirtaki* grounds all the others. I can't resist coming back to it.

On our third day in Crete, a Sunday, Manolis, our young Cretan coach driver, winds us onto the Akrotiri peninsula, just northeast of Chania, where we stop to tour the Moni Agia-Triada ("Monastery of the Holy Trinity"): the first time the students have wandered through a Greek Orthodox monastery. Potted plants cover stairways; a pale ochre, common in Crete, covers the main church; some of us spot Nazi graffiti (1941) on the bell tower.

From the monastery we wind a few miles northwest to Stavros village and beach, near the bulbous peninsula's northern tip. Particularly for my Greek-American colleague and co-conspirator, John Xanthapoulos, and myself, we've reached Ground Zero. A big wooden sign, "Zorbas Beach," hangs over the end of a short plank promenade between asphalt and beach; potted plants line both sides. Two blow-up posters—scenes from the film's climax as Zorba (Quinn) leads Basil (Bates) in the *sirtaki*—are fixed with cord within stout metal pole frames and flank the big sign. The one on the left proclaims, "This is the beach of Zorba." John and I clutch each side of the frame for a photo. I've wanted to enter this set for a long time.

John, who emigrated to Queens, New York City, as a teenager with his folks, has been my university colleague and friend for more than a score of years. Back in the day he was an expert horseman, especially in hunters and jumpers; nowadays, though his hair has thinned his enthusiasm has not, and Education students glow over his excitement and interest in them. When I'd teach *Zorba* he would join us for a session, his eagerness as palpable as mine. Two years earlier we'd taken eleven students through northwest Greece (Epirus), the Ionian islands, and the Peloponnese for two-and-a-half weeks. But we'd had our hearts set on Crete for years before that.

Now lounge chairs and umbrellas available for rent (10 Euros), in neat rows, cover some of the beach at September's end. They're almost entirely empty. Behind us, a rundown café or two doesn't obscure Madame Hortense's (Lila Kedrova's character) house in the movie, now in private hands and made over more than once. Beyond that, the small church used for distance shots. To our right, opposite the small rounded bay's mouth, the cottage where Basil and Zorba stay, now masked by a pair of shade trees. Above all, the moderate angle slope on the bay's east side is instantly recognizable from Cacoyannis's film: along this slope, the disastrous pole-trestle-cable system had been installed for Zorba's great venture in transporting logs from the monastery above. Towards the top I make out a cave.

Much more Basil than Zorba, I'm in their space at long last, re-watching in my head, edging closer to Zorba.

Like the others I quickly change to swimming suit, then breast-stroke to the bay's mouth; others have swum across to the base of the slope, close to the scene where monks, miners, and villagers scatter from the trestle-cable disaster. I blink away the ranks of beach chairs, the food kiosks and tables, and return the bay to its quieter appearance in 1963-64. Later at "Mama's" Lynn, my wife, has ordered a Greek salad and gyros plate; I raise my glass of *Mythos* beer to *Zorba* and Cacoyannis and company. I know he'd wanted to film *Zorba* on Crete, a decision that, along with every other element, had the full blessing of Kazantzakis's widow (and biographer), Helen. I've walked closer to his famous novel and character.

IV

During college I began to reach for other titles: *The Greek Passion* (*Christ Recrucified*), *Freedom and Death* (*Capitan Michalis*), *Saint Francis* (*God's Pauper*), and *Report to Greco*. In my first forays, I didn't understand, for instance, details of Cretan village mores or history. From *Saint Francis* I learned one of his great themes: the eternal struggle between the carnal and the spiritual even in a relentlessly self-denying, spiritual life. From his *Report*, a summative spiritual autobiography, I learned his own detailed quest, the writer self-cast as existential Everyman. In a sense, his final book to appear in English translation summarizes all the novels as it exemplifies life as the soul's restless, relentless quest for validation. Like his repurposed Odysseus.

Soon after college I bought a copy of his giant *Odyssey: A Modern Sequel*, in the Kimon Friar translation: a sturdy Touchstone Books paperback with orange cover. I read about Friar's close collaboration with Kazantzakis, during the writer's final year (1956-57), as he worked on the translation. But my copy gathered dust in closets for decades. I moved it when I moved everything, refused to part with it. A few years ago I finally girded my loins, pulled it out, and slogged through. Over three times longer than Homer's *Odyssey,* Kazantzakis's epic takes us south into Africa and increasingly abstruse regions. Magnificent poetry

in lots of spots, but one hard steep path to climb. His magnum opus is only for the most devoted.

I knew I should return to fiction.

With John X, as he's called, and Yorgos organizing the itinerary, I created an interdisciplinary course that focused upon Minoan history, El Greco, and most of all, Kazantzakis. I assigned *Zorba, Freedom and Death,* and *Report to Greco.* None of these students have ever heard of Kazantzakis. I'm pretty sure they all read *Zorba* but by the time we got to the *Report,* I'm guessing only one student—a small bright guy from Idaho I'd had in a freshman writing course—read it through. Rory later gifted me a hardback copy, with protective plastic over the dust jacket, of the English translation first edition (1965).

When I taught *Freedom and Death* (i.e. *Capitan Michalis*), I realized afresh how this novel is drenched in Kazantzakis's early years in Iraklion. If he portrayed his ardently patriotic father in the fanatic title character, presumably facets of himself appear in the wandering nephew, Kosmos, who ultimately comes home and joins his uncle among the holdout rebels in the mountains above Iraklion ("Megalokastro," an older name), just as Kazantzakis returned to his childhood in writing it.

I'd forgotten how often the Arkadhi Monastery is cited in the novel, but it echoed in my head as our bus wound up the wooded gorge southeast of Rethimno. We're lucky, as this national shrine is not overrun: only a pair of buses besides ours, and they've arrived later.

I wander through the 16th-century Rococo church and the rest of the rooms and courtyards on my own. I always prefer it that way.

Arkadhi became most famous as a site for local resistance against the Turks in 1866-67: hundreds of Cretan families took refuge here, and in the famous climax, when Turks were poised to overrun the place, the defenders ignited a powder magazine, killing hundreds and attracting an international outcry in the cause of Cretan freedom from the Ottoman Empire. Arkadhi proved only one episode in the turbulent 19th-century. That room, a long barrel vault missing its lid, hushes voices. I step quietly forward over pea gravel, studying the shrine bedecked with memorials and a tableau of representative figures.

Outside the monastery I peer in the ossuary cases poised on the lip of the shallow gorge, pretending the skulls belong not to monks but the local dead from 150 years ago.

V

A day or two later, after our bus has reached Iraklion, I'm still thinking about *Freedom and Death*. Several big shade trees outline the Morosini Fountain in the one of the old town's two central squares (*Platia Venizelou*). Sitting at a café table eating *bougatsa,* the local specialty pastry, I suddenly recall the story from Kazantzakis's childhood, when his ferocious father led him by hand to see three corpses hanging from one of those trees (or a predecessor): rebels hanged by the Turks.

No one would call Iraklion, Crete's largest city and capital and the writer's home town, pretty. After checking into the Hotel Astoria Capsis on the northwest edge of Liberty Square (*Platia Eleftherias*), I set off—solo, as is my wont—on a mission, passing the Kazantzakis bust in Kazantzaki Square. Seven bastions, bulging stone beads on an angular green necklace of parks, gird the old city. I thread south, uphill, to the highpoint, Montinego Bastion, which is flanked by Jesus and Bethlehem Bastions. I'd read, many years ago, that Kazantzakis was buried in Iraklion's city walls and I'm drawn, a moth to his flame.

I've always craved literary pilgrimages because I value writers more than other kinds of people, except composers and songwriters. I plunge into biography, happily sink into the narrowing spaces between the work and the life. I'm too eager to peer into their corners, connect local geography, somehow, with their reputation. I walk their ground

to get closer. I have followed Wordsworth (the Lake District and Mt. Snowdon), the Brontes (Haworth), Dickens (London, Rochester, and a certain marsh just south of the Thames), Ibsen (Oslo's Grand Café), Thomas Mann and Gunter Grass (Lubeck, Germany), Emily Dickinson (Amherst, Mass.), Melville (Arrowhead, Pittsfield, Mass.), Faulkner (Rowan Oak, Oxford, Mississippi, a part of the Ole Miss campus). Isak Dinesen (Nairobi and Rungstedlund, Denmark), Bertolt Brecht (Berlin). Stop! But I can't help it. I apologize for the brag list, but keeping track matters. And these journeys keep me tingling.

Are you obsessed too? Do you stalk writers in their home ground?

And I visit graves to pay respects: Faulkner's in Oxford, Hemingway's in Ketchum, Idaho. Maybe you have, too. When I stayed in Paris a couple of weeks, I plunged through its four most famous historic cemeteries: miniature villages that contain so much cultural history. I stalked those lanes, detailed guides in hand.

I'll see the black-and-white photos of the plane and gun carriage cortege that brought Kazantzakis's body home (11/5/1957), the state funeral in Saint Minos Cathedral. Now I mount the wide steps and reach his raised stone monument amidst a plot of grass. Small gardens and a few palm trees surround the plot. The other two tourists leave. In late afternoon's heat, I've the site to myself. A football (soccer) game in progress in a stadium just south erupts in waves. Helen Kazantzakis's grave (1904-2004) lies closer to the bastion's southern edge.

In front of the raised mortared stone, a large metal cross casts a shadow across the vertical limestone slab mounted near the monument's west edge. Would he have approved? The epitaph he'd chosen, carved into the limestone, reads (in Greek, of course), "I hope for nothing, I fear nothing, I am free." That credo signifies, for the writer, the Cretan Glance, which I later find glossed in a book about him: "The Cretan Glance means no more than to consciously face the lack of meaning, the void and death itself without fear or hope." That epitaph, marking him as existential hero, demands our pause, invites us in. How many think at length about it, accept its fierce demands? I fall far short.

Later my wife buys me a T-shirt imprinted with the epitaph. In that late afternoon I think back to my first reading of *Zorba* and later encounters with the other novels as I pan the view with my smartphone camera. The Cretan Sea flashes between boxy buildings of little or no interest: Iraklion doesn't please the eye like Chania or Rhetimno or Agios Nikolaos.

Days later when the group has returned to Iraklion, I'll guide the other up the steps to the gravesite. I've already stood in silence.

VI

I also slip away, one afternoon, from the domineering tour guide, Constantina ("Dina") Mouzakis, to the Historical Museum of Crete: a handsome neo-classical building a few blocks west of the Venetian Harbor and 16th-century castle. On the third floor, Rooms 17-19 comprise the "Nikos Kazantzakis Collection." Beyond the career summary--photographs, translated editions of novels, some final draft manuscripts (tall stacks of typed notepaper), a few letters—I gaze into his carefully reconstructed study from his home in Antibes, France, where he lived after World War II and wrote most of his fiction.

I'm looking into the holy grail: neither sumptuous nor stark, somewhere in between. Low bookshelves span two walls, the wooden desk near the windows neatly arranged like the surrounding furniture, nothing cluttered. I remember gazing upon Herman Melville's desk, in the second-floor study of his home where he wrote *Moby-Dick*. In old age, Kazantzakis, who'd left Greece again in 1946, consented to having his study moved to his hometown museum. In the quiet I picture Kazantzakis, old and tall and ascetic, thin hair combed straight back, glasses and trim black mustache, warming that seat, writing quickly as though he knew he wouldn't live as long as he wanted.

The family home in Iraklion was destroyed years after his death in one of the city's clumsy forays into modernization. In this Museum,

at least, I stand, uninvited, on the edge of one of his most important rooms.

A few days before our group returned to Iraklion, Yorgos had Manolis pull our bus into a deserted parking lot on a beach strand just east of Sitia. A lip of rocks, little sand, flecks of trash flutter in the breeze. Yorgos, delivering on a promise ("Teach me to dance, will you?"), rests his small boom box against the curb, turns up the volume on Zorba's Dance as the students and others loosely clasp neighbors' shoulders and form a loose circle, eyes on his feet.

This *sirtaki* is not too hard, after all. They follow Yorgos's lead easily on the *Hassapiko* but later, in the fast *Hassaposerviko*, the line inevitably falls apart amid laughter. In the slow section, right then left two-three times, fingers snapping on the beat; then forward, tap heel, scoop shoe, kick, then repeat, cross to the right, 1-2-3, cross to the left, 1-2-3, point, kick. Something like that. The kick and heel point, body slightly bent, looks graceful. In the fast section, right foot behind then step, then right kick, then left kick, and repeat. Hop gently in easy 2/4 rhythm.

The students' and older travelers' eyes shine in the common embrace and laughter pours in their bodies' common motion. I watch. Few if any have heard of Kazantzakis, our primary *raison d'etre* on Crete, before this college course and trip. Maybe learning this *sirtaki* takes them as close to the writer as they wish. But they've listened to me, watched my obsession unfolding.

VII

Leaving Iraklion the first time to travel farther east on the island, we make two stops south of the city, then wind on a secondary road along the usual ridges with the usual olive groves spreading above and below to reach the village of Mirtia (a.k.a. Varvari), home since 1983 of the Nikos Kazantzakis Museum. Mirtia was Kazantzakis's father's village, and a distant relative, stage-costume designer Giorgos Anemogiannis, worked for years to build the archive and establish the Museum here.

Bright murals in shades of blue—Quinn-as-Zorba, necktie loosened, dancing the *sirtaki*; tonsured St. Francis, subject of *God's Pauper,* in profile—cover the wall of the small parking lot. Immediately to the right of the steps leading into the modern, two-story museum, a blown-up photo of Kazantzakis, arms neatly folded, hangs above a quotation from *The Fratricides* (in Greek and English: "Ideas exist only because they are carried / by people who grant them / their own human height").

In the first floor's screening room, the requisite introductory video that orients everyone. I'm in heaven but feel overwhelmed. So much more to Kazantzakis's oeuvre—his steady production of plays and travel books—than I knew. The wealth of translations in display cases attests to his status as a world-class writer. I'm introduced to the current director, who thanks me for bringing this class from the U.S.

He gifts me a copy of Litza Chatzopoulou's *Kazantzakis Through The Museum Collections,* an excellent 120-pp. compendium of biography, photographs, and other images. I'm the last to leave the Museum for the adjacent cafe and my eyes swim as I pore over photos and letters, energized to continue my search.

I sit, distracted, before my coffee at the café table. I realize this stop—all the Kazantzakis stops—are for me. If the students get anything out of it, that's just gravy. We pile back on the bus, explore Crete's east end, return to Iraklion, ferry back to Piraeus. I don't want to leave *Kriti*.

VIII

On this trip, the tour guide never changes. Dina, a widow of many years, wears her hair short and eats and smokes whenever possible. Early on the trip, she announced to everyone: "If I had a choice in my bed between a man and a stocked refrigerator, I take the refrigerator." I roll my eyes at the students. Dina's pants suits fit tightly and she breathes stertorously. Her English phonetics and syntax are so idiosyncratic that most don't follow her. She calls Kazantzakis's novels by their Greek, not translated, names. I try translating, even co-instructing, but both fail. She doesn't like to share, her tongue drives one speed, and we drown in her flow.

In front of a statue of Leonidas in Sparta, she informs everyone that Napoleon came from a Greek family. Another time she reports that the Minoans reached North America. John Xanthopoulos reprimands her, each evening, that she can't "teach" such stuff she's read on off-the-wall websites bereft of legitimacy.

Dina talks over heads every day. She pitches Kazantzakis and other subjects—Minoan history, for instance--as though these students sit in a doctoral seminar. Her abiding unawareness of her captive audience (at least, captive on the bus) stuns me. She shows no ability to select content, to translate for a more generalized and unspecialized group. I'm appalled and increasingly avoid her off the bus, as do most

students. They can't abide being talked down to so consistently. In my decades of college teaching I've rarely witnessed such failure.

About Kazantazakis, though, she's spot on. After my anger fades, I realize her gift to me.

When we're talking alone, she tells me she must rest in her hotel rooms, isolate herself to curb her anxieties. One time she confides that she's done nothing but read and study Kazantzakis for the eight months in preparation for this trip. She quotes from his *Odyssey,* his *Spiritual Exercises,* his published letters to Prevelakis, "our" three novels, Helen Kazantzakis's biography. She tells me to read the Peter Bien biography before I read Helen Kazantzakis's. My private tutor, she's extended my search for years.

Back on the mainland, as the bus threads the north edge of the Saronic Gulf on the motorway leading back to Athens, I glance at the island of *Eyina* (Aegina) shining mid-distance. I see the outline of Eyina Town, the island's capital. My eyes step slightly north, to the suburb of Livadhi and a plaque on the wall of Kazantzakis's home during the World War II years. He wrote *Zorba* here. I need to be there, touch this place. Another trip.

On our last night we sit at a long, central table perpendicular to the stage at Kalokairinos, in Athens's Plaka district. Usual sequence of plates, bottles of local red and white wines. In the back of the stage, the house band: three old musicians, their fingers easy and effortless, the bouzouki player on the right,. They accompany four pairs of dancers who look to be in their twenties and who sometimes invite the

audience up. Of course we dance *the sirtaki,* weave in sinuous lines off stage. Students won't forget this finale. And they might even remember the name of this Greek writer whom the tour guide and professor couldn't stop talking about.

Because of Crete I have drawn much closer to the Greek writer I first fell in love with at age eighteen. When you enter an outdoor movie set, touch his grave, peer into his study, graze through his museum in his father's village, you get closer. In another sense he remains remote because of the breadth of his oeuvre, the translation gap, the ascetic challenge of his endless quest. But I'm jazzed, I want to get inside his head more in my old age.

I wear the shirt though I'll likely never achieve the Cretan glance: "I hope for nothing, I fear nothing, I am free." But I close my eyes and Theodorakis's most famous tune sings, and I hear the bouzouki's timbre, and my body sways.

O.Alan Weltzien, a newly retired English professor in Montana (state), USA, has published lots of academic articles, two chapbooks, and ten books. These include a memoir, “A Father and an Island” (Lewis-Clark Press, 2008), and three poetry collections, most recently “Rembrandt in the Stairwell” (FootHills Publishing, 2016). His newest book, “Savage West: The Life and Fiction of Thomas Savage” (Sept. 2020), is a biography of Montana novelist, Thomas Savage. Weltzien had two Fulbright Fellowships (Poland, Bulgaria) and one University of Montana International Faculty Award (Australia). He and his wife have travelled to Greece four times, summers and autumn and winter. Weltzien still skis in winter and scrambles peaks in summer. In retirement he continues to write poetry as well as personal and travel essays.

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